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*By*

NORA A. SMITH

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# THREE LITTLE MARYS



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MARKET-DAY (page 84)



# Three Little Marys

BY  
NORA  
ARCHIBALD  
SMITH



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NOTE.—The first and second of these stories appeared originally in the *Young People's Weekly*, and are here reprinted by courtesy of the publishers of that paper.





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SHEILA OF THE WALL-HOUSE





# SHEILA OF THE WALL-HOUSE

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## CHAPTER I

### THE WEE HOUSIE IN THE WALL

As you climb the hill to the arched bridge over the Aora River in the West Highlands, Loch Fyne shines blue upon your right hand, and the heavy stone wall about the Duke's grounds is on your left. It is covered so thickly with dense masses of ivy at this point that it looks like a rampart of green, and above it the beeches trail their spreading branches and the blossoming horse-chestnuts hold out their fragrant spikes of feathery white.

Half-way up the hill a reek of blue smoke rises from the wall, as if the great stones below were all on fire. Stop a moment, wondering at the strange sight, and, looking closely

in among the boughs and the thick leaves, you will see a little chimney overtopping the ivy sprays. Draw nearer still, and there below in the green peeps out a tiny, diamond-paned window, where a thrush hangs in a wicker cage. It is a wee housie in the wall. There are pots of flowers outside the lattice and a mound of shells below, and there is a little green door with a brass knocker half screened by trailing ivy. It opens and you see a pink-washed step and passage, and the red glow of a fire beyond. It is a gardener's cottage built into the wall and forming part of it, one of the old, old-time houses of Inneraora town; and there, tucked away behind her leafy screen, lived Sheila, the gardener's daughter, as warm and cosy as a bird in a nest.

Beyond the house was the great Duke's castle, his copper beeches, his azaleas, his pink and crimson rhododendrons, his yellow laburnums, his swans and his peacocks. In front, across the roadway, lay fair Loch Fyne, and over the loch rose a range of highland peaks, — Ben Vane, Ben Arthur, and Ben Ime with

his shifting lights and shadows and the snow-wreaths that lay about his lordly shoulders.

To the south, a great knob pushing out from the hills, was the "Fairy Knowe," and Sheila never opened her window in the morning but that she looked out first at the Knowe and thought of the stories she had been told of the little green men dancing there on midsummer nights, and of the fairy piper piping so clearly that her grandsire had often heard him, so he said, when the wind blew from the right quarter.

Behind the wall-house, the great beeches rose high in air, and below them, in the thick, soft moss, and among the gnarled tree-roots, Sheila's cocks and hens clucked and crew and scratched, happy and contented no doubt, but quite unconscious of their blessings in the way of a beautiful home. There were plenty of feathered neighbors, for the rooks cawed all day in the beeches; down on the shore there were gulls and pigeons and long-legged herons a-fishing, and great wild geese every day went honking by and settled to feed in the meadows beyond.

There were sheep in the Duke's fields up Glen Shira, and more lambs with tight black stockings and inky black faces than you could count in an hour; there were birds, too, of every kind, fluttering and singing in every bush and tree and every thicket of yellow gorse up the glen, down the glen, on the hills, by the burns, wherever a bird could sing or flutter. So you see there was no lack of companions for Sheila, of every kind, save the talking kind; and, as for that, she did have a baby brother, a fat, yellow-haired little fellow, whose accomplishments in language had now progressed as far as the family names.

When Sheila went to school, of course she had plenty of playmates. She put on her red cape in the morning, took her bag of books, ran along the road a little way, and then climbed a ladder that rested on the wall and led to a short cut to the town through the Duke's woods. If His Grace had ever been out walking at that hour, and had seen a yellow-haired lassie in a red cloak come trotting along all alone under his beeches, he would at once have



thought, despite himself, of the heroine of a well-known fairy tale, and have begun to peer about through the branches for the evil-intentioned wolf.

These morning scampers in the beech-tree avenue were over now, however, for it was vacation, and that always meant some lonely hours for the little lady of the wall-house. She lived on the edge of the world, you see, not quite in the country, and yet so far from town that other children could hardly visit her, unless they came by special invitation.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TRAVELING TINKERS

ONE sunny morning early in May Sheila wandered down the road, with baby Tam toddling by her side. Far below lay the town following the curve of the loch, its stone houses washed in faint colors, — gray and pink and cream and white and fawn. Every one had a door in the middle, a window each side, and three above, and with their peaked roofs and the plume of smoke that rose straight into the air from every chimney, they looked like the houses that children draw on their slates. You could have made the church with two vertical, one horizontal, and two slanting lines, if you had put them together properly, and could have added the steeple afterwards to suit your taste. The houses had no front gardens and were built directly on the street, as they commonly are in Scot-

land, and they were set so primly on the loch-side, shoulder to shoulder, that they seemed like the Swiss villages one buys in boxes. Any child would have been almost tempted to reach out and take them up in his hands and toss them about and play with them.

The waves were lapping softly on the white beach beside the road, great bushes of gorse and clumps of whin were blossoming in yellow, and on the right, through the lodge gates, stretched a meadow so white with daisies that it looked like a field of snow. Baby saw the daisies, ran through the gates, his red pinafore flapping round his fat legs, and sat himself down in the midst of them, to the no small amazement of a flock of sheep dotted over the sward. They lifted their heads a moment, some of the lambs gave a questioning Ba-a-a, as if saying, "Is this all right, mother?" but in a moment all began eating again, — soft green grass and pink-tipped daisies, a meal as pretty to look at as it must have been delicious to the taste.

Sheila followed the baby, and seeing him

quietly at play, his lap and his chubby hands full of flowers, she sat down on a rock by the ledge to watch a fishing-boat beating down the loch.

Plash, plash, plash! sounded the waves, the gulls screamed on the shore, the swans floated up and down, the baby laughed in the meadow, and up the road came a strange company of travelers.

First walked a tall, dark, ragged man with a battered felt hat pulled over his eyes, and at his heels came a tiny gray donkey pulling a little cart loaded with bundles. Atop of all the bundles was throned a dirty, ragged child, of two years, perhaps, his hair as tangled as a crow's-nest, and his round face so smeared and stained that you could hardly tell what color it might be underneath. There were several black-haired women walking behind the cart, handkerchiefs of vivid yellow tied about their heads. There was a frouzy boy or two, and last of all came a barefooted, tattered girl of seven or eight years, a red shawl flung over her shoulders, and holding in both hands a

big shining tin pan that she pressed against her bosom as if it had been a shield. There was a fringe of dark hair over her forehead, her eyes were large and black, and her cheeks as brilliant scarlet as the poppy that blooms in the wheat.

The tin pan told the story of the company, had not the dirt and rags and the donkey already betrayed it; they were traveling tinkers taking their first spring "taste of the road."

As they passed the lodge gates, the child with the pan saw Sheila, and fixing round eyes of interest upon her, lagged so far behind the caravan that one of the women turned with a sharp, "Mairi! Dinna stan' gawpin' there!"

The little girl started in a bewildered way, as if returning to earth from a vision, and then looking back, called loudly in her turn, "Tana! Tana! Tana!"

As she waited, a thin, starved, gaunt, rough-haired collie came galloping breathlessly round a turn in the road, and with a frightened glance at the man far in front slunk into place at Mairi's side.

Sheila had risen from her seat and unconsciously strayed into the road as she watched the procession, and the baby, his red apron full of daisies, his bare legs and arms pink as their tips, stood by her side, one fat thumb in his mouth and his blue eyes staring wide.

As the tinkers descended the hill on the far side of the bridge, their rough voices and the sound of their feet died away, but to the last the girl with the red shawl continued to turn round and look back at Sheila, as if fascinated, the gleam of the tin pan disclosing her every movement.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CAMP BY THE LOCH-SIDE

IF the tinker lassie was interested in the little inmates of the wall-house, they were to the full as much interested in her; or at least Sheila was, for baby Tam, it must be confessed, forgot her before she was well out of sight. At breakfast next morning while the children were still scraping their porridge bowls with their spoons, their father said, pushing back his chair: —

“There’s some o’ they tinkler fouk up the loch by the Boshang gate, wumman.”

“I’m wae to ken that,” observed the careful mother, looking up as she put the dishes together.

“There’s a little lass wi’ ’em as big as me, mither,” cried Sheila eagerly, “an’ her name’s Mairi.”

“An’ hoo dae ye ken that, bairn?” asked her father.



“An auld gypsy wife ca’ed her that when they cam’ by,” answered the child, “an’ there was a collie rinnin’ alang beside her, an’ his name is Tana.”

“Tana, — that means ‘thin’ in the Gaelic,” said her father with a smile, “an’ ’t will be a guid name for the puir beastie, I’m thinkin’. But ye’d dae weel to steek the door on the chuckies, wumman, ilka nicht till the tinklers gang awa’.”

“Why, faither, wad they steal?” asked Sheila, in a horrified voice.

“Weel, I wadna say juist that,” cautiously, “but I’m thinkin’ they’d no be verra particular aboot frichtin’ awa’ a chuckie, gin they fund it strayin’ their gait,” he answered as he stood in the doorway. “But I maun be awa’ to my work noo, bairnies, for I’m thrang the day.”

Fortunately for Sheila’s plans, her mother too was “thrang,” and early requested the children to “rin awa’, like guid bairns,” so that she could give the “hoose a good reddin’ up.”

There was a slight smirr of rain, but not enough to keep Highland weans under cover, and they hurried off at the first suggestion, up the road toward Glen Shira. If facts are to be given, it could hardly be truthfully said that baby Tam hurried, however; and Sheila grew so impatient at last that she took him up in her arms and carried him part of the way, staggering under his weight and in momentary danger of dropping him on the stones.

A few hundred yards beyond the bridge the road bent inward somewhat, leaving a wide, grassy space between it and the rocks that led down to the water. Masses of gorse and whin were blooming here, and as the children drew near they saw that the tinkers had chosen this spot for their temporary home. A low fire with a black pot hanging over it was smouldering near some rocks, and one of the women crouched beside it, her orange-yellow headdress bright against the gray water. Tents of tattered, parti-colored bedquilts were pitched near and partly over the bushes, and there was another larger tent of sacking and

sheepskins stretched across curved ribs of wood like the top of an emigrant wagon.

Two men with an empty bottle beside them were asleep under a whin-bush, and as Sheila stood looking from the opposite bank, the dirty baby tottered out of one of the tents and fell over their long, outstretched legs. One of the men half awoke with a kick and a curse, and the child began to whimper. In a moment up from the rocks, fleet as a deer, darted the girl with the red shawl, and putting a protecting arm around the baby, lifted him out of the way of the threatening heels and into the road. As she looked up, still cooing soft Gaelic words to the frightened little one, she caught sight of Sheila on the bank, and again stood transfixed in what seemed like wonder and admiration. In truth, in all her dainty cleanliness, her white pinafore, her neat wool dress, her nicely blackened shoes, and her brilliant scarlet cape, the little lady of the wall-house must have seemed like an elaborate French doll to poor, barefooted Mairi in her rags and tatters. But it was not altogether

the clothes she was gazing at ; her heart went out to Sheila's yellow curls, her sea-blue eyes, and her shell-pink cheeks. She admired them all with a fervor that no one could know save a lassie whose eyes were as black as a squirrel's, whose color was like a full-blown peony, and whose tangled locks were as jetty as the feathers of the rooks.

She drooped her head before her visitors and turned aside a little, rubbing the grass with her bare feet, while Sheila dared to come no nearer for fear of the rough sleeping men.

The day might have ended here and Mairi been given no opportunity to speak to the object of her admiration, had not Tana, the rough, shaggy collie, come leaping up the rocks at this moment, and bounding toward the children, attempted to give them a warmer welcome than they desired.

"Dinna be feared!" cried Mairi, starting at once into animation. "Down, Tana, down, ye tyke!" pulling the dog by the tail. "He winna hurt ye, ye needna be feared."

Tam began to pull a long face and to hide

in the folds of his sister's cape, but the dirty baby toddling up, gravely presented him with a bit of shining tin as a sort of peace-offering ; and seeing that the dog licked the grimy little hand as he held it out, Tam took heart and began to make friends.

But again just as the lassies were about to speak, sounded a harsh voice from the shore, "Mairi! What for are ye stannin' there?" and a rough black head rose above the yellow gorse.

Sheila caught her brother by the hand at the sight, and said hurriedly, "It'll be my dinner time. I maun rin awa' hame."

"An' will ye come again?" pleaded Mairi, with quivering lips, seeing the lovely vision thus depart before it had been fairly seen.

"I will that, the morn's mornin'," promised Sheila, and as she turned the curve of the road, she looked back and waved her hand in farewell to the little red-shawled figure standing there alone.

## CHAPTER IV

### LOVE IN TATTERS

IT need hardly be said, perhaps, that the promise to come again to the tinker camp so blithely given by Sheila was not soon to be redeemed. Her mother was inclined to scold her for having gone there at all, refused to hear of another expedition, called the tinkers a "pack o' ne'er-dae-weels" and Sheila's friend "a gypsy gude-for-naught."

When she took the children out now, she said she had "messages" in the town, and went there instead of up the glen; and yet perhaps she was not quite as hard-hearted as she appeared toward the "gude-for-naught," for she did not forbid Sheila to speak to her when they met, and she once gave the dirty baby a fresh scone spread with gooseberry jam and looked on with approval while he devoured it.

It may be that she was melted by the great



dark eyes that looked wistfully in at the latticed window and along the pink passage every time Mairi passed; it may be that she was touched by the sudden smile that lighted the whole face when a glimpse of Sheila was caught. Once the gypsy was called to the window and allowed to look in at the clean stone floor, the shining dishes on the dresser, the red coals glowing in the open range, and the neat box-bed in the wall, its doors half open to show the white coverlid and frilled pillow-cases. "Ay, but it's bonnie!" sighed the child; but she would not even rest her hand on the window ledge, and drew her tattered dress about her lest she break the ivy sprays.

As the sun grew warmer and the primroses and hyacinths spread a thick carpet of yellow and violet up the glen, Sheila would find every morning a great bunch of freshly gathered flowers on her pink doorstone, and sometimes, too, a bunch of groundsel for the thrush would lie beside his cage. She never went as far as the bridge with baby Tam that Mairi did not appear in a flash, and it began to seem as if



she must lie in wait up there, watching for a glimpse of the object of her worship. The dirty baby was generally in her arms, or tagging at her heels, for she seemed to be his only nurse and care-taker; and as he was too small for long tramps, she was frequently left alone with him all day while the tinkers roamed the country.

Sheila and her father were going into the Castle grounds one morning, when they saw her sitting on the grass by the roadside, shyly watching them from under her long black lashes.

"Lat her come in an' see the peacocks, faither!" begged Sheila, pulling at his coat.

"Weel, lassie, but min' that she doesna meddle wi' the floo'rs, nor fricht the birds," said the careful gardener; "an' I'm thinkin' she's ower dirty for the place, onyway."

"Oh, faither, no, she's no an ill bairn; she'll do nae harm," cried Sheila eagerly. "Come awa' then, Mairi!"

The child and her charge, half-pleased, half-frightened, ventured just inside the gates,

but no persuasion could entice them any further; and perhaps it was just as well, for the lodge-keeper's wife bent a stern and suspicious eye upon them from her window. Still it was a delightful occasion, for the little gypsies could see from their place the whole circular sweep of the Duke's crimson rhododendrons, and the peacocks obligingly came down from the Castle and strutted and wheeled and spread their gorgeous fans for a half-hour on the sward.

More than this, Sheila's father told her to "gang her ways hame" when he had finished his work by the gates, and her humble followers were privileged to walk by her side to the wall-house. It was on this golden morning, long to be remembered, when Mrs. MacArthur allowed the "gude-for-naught to come in by" while Sheila showed her the doll given her by the "little leddies at the Castle," a doll with a china head and arms of kid and feet with real shoes on them. Mairi's admiration for this eighth wonder of the world was so great that Sheila's heart swelled with pride, and she

went so far as to lay it in her arms for a minute, well rewarded by the look of rapture that came into the dark eyes of the little waif.

It was only the next night, when as Mrs. MacArthur was counting the fowls before she locked them up, — a proceeding never neglected since the tinkers came to town, — she missed a particularly fine Langshanks cockerel that she had planned on selling at a good price to the housekeeper at the Castle. Great was the outcry at once, and when the valued bird could not be found in any of the crofts or byres, the neighboring gypsies were loudly accused, and the aggrieved hen-wife reproached herself for ever allowing that “ill cratur, Mairi,” to come about the place.

Sheila hotly defended her friend ; but as she could offer no other reasonable explanation for the absence of the cockerel, her words made little impression, and she crept upstairs to her bed very wretched and disconsolate.

She was only half undressed, when there came a sound at her lattice like the brush of a bird’s wing, and a handful of yellow blos-

soms flew through the air and fell on the floor at her feet. Sheila ran to the window, and there outside in the dusk stood Mairi, panting and shivering, tears streaming down her cheeks and holding up in her trembling hands the Langshanks cockerel.

“They stole yer chuckie,” she sobbed. “I foun’ him mysel’ unner the bushes the nicht. They had him tied there, but I pu’d him oot an’ he isna hurtit. They wad ha’ sellt him i’ the toun, but I slippit awa’ wi’ him an’ brocht him to ye. I’ll be lickit, but I dinna care. They shanna hae yer bonnie chuckie !”

## CHAPTER V

### LOST IN GLEN SHIRA

THE incident of the Langshanks cockerel did not prepossess Mrs. MacArthur in favor of the tinkers, although Mairi, it would seem, had done her best to blot out their transgressions. As they were but gypsy vagabonds always on the road, it was safe to suppose that they would take up their line of march before long; but the uncertain date of their departure somewhat wore upon the nerves of the prudent mother and careful hen-wife.

For several days after the return of the stolen property, nothing was seen of Mairi, though Sheila spent half her time at the window or in the doorway looking up and down the road.

One gray afternoon Tam had fallen asleep, tired out with play, and Sheila went out alone toward the bridge. She had been forbidden

to visit the tinkers' camp, but not to go up Glen Shira, though perhaps, if she had considered the matter a little longer, she would have known that the one prohibition included the other. Nothing was to be seen of either Mairi or Tana on the bridge, and no one was visible in the tents as she passed. Evidently the whole company of tinkers was off on the tramp, and Sheila, sharply disappointed, for she had hoped at least to catch a glimpse of her gypsy friend, wandered along alone. Everything was beautiful about her. The loch shone in blue, violet, and gray like the shifting colors on a pigeon's neck; the lace-like green of the young trees lay soft against the dark firs on the hillsides; the mountains were a deep purple, and the mossy green roots of the beeches straggled in a tangle all over the steep bank beside the road. Gray rabbits with white-lined tails scuttled in and out of their holes in the roots, the ground was tufted with primroses and purple with hyacinths, little burns gurgled down among the flowers, the cuckoos called, the curlews piped, and other



birds in myriads chirped and trilled in the wood and on the hillside. There were a thousand lovely things to see and to hear, and yet, for lack of a companion, Sheila had no pleasure in them.

Far up the glen she came to a little loch where the fish were leaping, and beside it stood a boat-house where she had often gone with her father. He had taken her out fishing with him many times, and she had grown quite expert in paddling about under his directions. It struck her now that it would be great fun to get the boat out and row up and down the loch a while, since there was no one to play with and nothing to do, and she ran to get the key where it hung under the eaves. She could just reach the padlock, and by using all her strength pull the barred gates open a little way and slip in. The house was built partly on the land and partly over the water, so that the fishermen could row directly in when the gates were opened, and at the back the boats were pulled up on the rocks.

Sheila saw that the nearest was the one her



father had used, and, quite excited with the exploit, ran to push it into the water. She might as well have pushed against a house, or against her own stone wall. She swelled out her chest till the buttons flew off her frock, and bent over till her face was as red as a cherry, but the boat lay there, immovable as the rocks it rested on. A breeze sprang up for a moment, swung to the great gates with a clang, and rustled the plane-tree outside so that its leaves scratched a warning on the slate roof. Sheila looked up, but concluding that as she had found her way in she could easily get out again, made another effort at pushing. It was all of no avail; and now it occurred to her, for she was a determined little person, that she might take off her shoes and stockings, wade into the water, and pull the boat from the other end. No sooner thought than done; but the obstinate craft cared no more for pulling than it did for pushing, and the only result was a slip on the slimy rocks and the splash of a white pinafore in the water.

Cold and wet, the child dragged herself

out, and then, at last, as she looked at her stained and dripping clothes, the full extent of her misdeeds dawned upon her. Half crying, she caught up her shoes and stockings and ran to the gates, but to her horror they would not open. She beat and pulled and pushed and tugged, but the cross-bar which the padlock fastened in place had somehow fallen when the wind shut the gates and was wedged against the rocks outside.

Sheila knew very well that no one was at all likely to come up the lonely glen so late in the afternoon, but she did not stop to reason when she found she was a prisoner, and she called and cried for her father, for her mother, for somebody, anybody, to help her, till she was quite exhausted.

The gates were only about eight feet tall, and there was plenty of room at the top to creep over, but in spite of all her trying she could get no foothold by which to climb up. There was a narrow space at the bottom also, on the land side, but unless you had been a dog and could have flattened yourself out like

a sheet of paper, you could hardly have crawled under there.

Punishment commonly comes quickly enough on the heels of error, as even children find out betimes; but on this occasion it had crashed down without a moment's warning, and Sheila, tired out, repentant, cold, shivering, frightened as the shadows grew longer outside and the dusk deepened in the boat-house, sank down despairing in a little heap on the rocks.

## CHAPTER VI

### TANA TO THE RESCUE

IN the mean time Sheila's mother had begun to grow anxious about her. She had been away half an hour, perhaps, when the baby awoke and demanded his playmate. Mrs. Mac-Arthur went to the door, and looking up and down the road, called her as loudly as she could, but no answer came; and she went in and tried to amuse the restless child herself, concluding that Sheila would return before long. She did not come; and when it was nearly supper time her mother threw her apron over her head and ran to look for her everywhere that she could think of, but of course without success.

When the gudeman came home Sheila's disappearance was reported by the troubled mother, now seriously uneasy, and in his turn the father called and searched without result.

"I'll gae speer at they tinklers ; they'll maybe hae seen her," said he at length, and set off at once for the camp.

The whole troop was at home when he arrived, the pot was boiling, the women were moving about in the gorse, and two or three of the men lay smoking by the tents.

"Hae ony o' ye seen ma bairn?" cried the gardener, striding to the edge of the grass.

One of the ragged fellows sat up with a half-frightened, half-angry look, as if he had been accused of stealing sheep.

"Whatna bairn?" he growled. "There's mair bairns than ane i' the toun."

"Ma Sheila," answered the gardener anxiously. "Ma Sheila, that's freens wi' yer bit lassie here. We canna fin' her."

"We haena seen her, an' we dinna ken nae-thing aboot her," gruffly answered the surly fellow, falling back on the grass. "It's mair nor we can dae to min' oor ain weans."

The gardener walked away disheartened, but the end of the search was nearer than he thought ; for down on the shore sat Mairi with



FOLLOWED BY HIS EXCITED MISTRESS





her dog, and she had heard every word that had been said. Quick as a flash she crouched under the bank and, followed by Tana, crept up to the road unseen, moving as quietly as she could. Once there, she took from the bosom of her tattered frock a treasured ribbon given her by Sheila, and showing it to the dog and letting him smell it, whispered softly, "Seek, Tana! Seek for her, guid dog!"

Tana at first seemed puzzled, but finally appeared to understand what was wanted of him, and after a little preliminary snuffing at the dust and a whisk down to the bridge and back, started up the glen on a steady trot, followed by his excited mistress.

It was scarcely yet dusk outside, though it was nearly nine o'clock at night, when Sheila, half asleep on the rocks, heard a glad bark at the gates, and in a moment Tana crept beneath them and leaped to her side, licking her face and hands in his doggish joy.

"Are ye there, Sheila?" called Mairi in a trembling voice, at the bars.

"Oh, Mairi, it was gude o' ye to come!"

sobbed the prisoner. "I dinna ken how lang I hae been here i' the mirk. Oh, will ye rin an' get my faither? I'm fair chittering wi' cauld, an' I'm awfu' feared alane here."

"I'll dae onything ye want me tae," answered Mairi, crying for sympathy. "Dinna greet, Sheila; I'll come back; an' I'll lave ye Tana, so ye winna be a' yer lane."

The minutes seemed long to poor Sheila till she heard her father's welcome voice, but the wind never blew down the glen faster than Mairi's bare feet pattered on her errand of mercy, and purer joy never shone in any face than shone in hers when she saw her little beloved taken up in the gardener's strong arms.

There was scolding and petting in equal measure at the wall-house when Sheila reached home and told her adventures, but her mother had nothing but praise for Mairi this time, and agreed that the lass was too good to waste on "they tinkler-fouk," and that "if they'd give her up, she was weel minded to give her a hame her ainsel."

Next morning Sheila woke a little later than

usual, but when she ran downstairs and opened the green door with the brass knocker, she found the pink doorstep a perfect garden of flowers. All around the stone, like a broad frame, were set the golden blossoms of the gorse and whin, and within the space lay feathery grasses, bunches of primroses set in softest moss, and heaps of purple hyacinths, while a branch of pink thorn lay above them all.

Catching up the may-blossoms as she leaped over the doorstep, Sheila hurried to the bridge to give Mairi the thanks she had omitted in the excitement of the night before. No one was there, neither child, dog, nor baby; and as she ran down the hill on the other side no scarlet shawl flashed into sight and no dark eyes beamed a welcome.

She ventured a little farther and looked toward the camp, but where was it? — or could she be in the right place? A few steps nearer still; nearer yet; then to the edge of the trampled grass.

The embers of a dying fire glowed red among the bushes, scraps of tin shone here

and there upon the ground, a heap of rags lay half hidden under the whins, but tents, women, men, donkey, and children, — all had vanished.

Suddenly as the tinkers had come, they had departed, and the place of their habitation knew them no more. But sweeter than the perfume of the flowers she had gathered was the memory of Mairi's loving, generous spirit, — a memory that lingered long in the green glade where once rested the tents of the gypsies.

THE STRANGER IN THE HEDGE





# THE STRANGER IN THE HEDGE

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## CHAPTER I

### A ROYAL TEA PARTY

“Now I must be the Queen,” said Molly, “and you must be a lady come to take tea. Will you have another cup, ma’am, and sugar and cream? Yes, it is very hot for the time of year. I feel it myself, and sometimes I could wish my crown was n’t quite so heavy. No, ma’am, I can’t take it off very well; the Queen can’t do just the same as other folks, you know,” sitting up proudly and fanning herself with a rhubarb leaf.

It was easy to see that Molly represented some potentate, if not Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, for a crown of flowers lay upon her flaxen locks. Her throne was set among the roots of the great oak tree by the spring, and softer cushions of grass and moss no sovereign ever had.

Pinned to her shoulders was a long white counterpane representing the royal robes, no doubt, and her sceptre was an alder twig with a cluster of leaves at the tip. It may be questioned whether the rulers of the earth often partake of afternoon tea while decked in the garments of office, but if you want to play you are a queen, there must be some insignia to denote your rank, or how is it to be recognized?

Arrayed as she was, no one could for a moment have mistaken Molly's station, and no doubt the lady invited to tea would have been properly impressed if there had been any such person. Look as you might around and about the oak tree, however, no living creature was to be seen save the rabbits frolicking in and out of their holes in the bank, and none was to be heard save the doves cooing in the grove. As for the tea, that was unfortunately absent, also, but an only child, and a motherless one at that, must use a great deal of make-believe if she is to enjoy her play, and experience had taught Molly that lesson long ago.

The little girl's lot was rather an uncommon

one in every way. Few children, in England especially, are without sisters or brothers; few are so unfortunate as to lose a dear mother when they are only nine years old, and fewer still have a poor crippled father who hobbles about with a wooden leg strapped to his side. It sometimes seems as if when people began life under somewhat unusual circumstances, shooting comet-like across the sky instead of following a beaten track like a sober planet, that unusual things keep on happening to them. They attract them, perhaps, as the magnet does the iron filings, and this was certainly the case with Molly Stokes. She did not even live in an ordinary house, on an ordinary road or street, with ordinary neighbors, but her home was set in the middle of a field on the way to nowhere.

Walking along the smooth, well-made high-road bordered by hedges of oak and thorn, the Sussex Downs misty-blue in the distance, you suddenly saw some steps fixed in the high bank. Of course you climbed them, — everybody must have done so who had time, and

even stray dogs were always leaping up and standing at the top, one paw lifted in surprise. The surprise must have been because there was nothing unusual there, not because there was ; for unless you pursued the matter somewhat further, naught but a rye-field met your view. But walk along a little way, climb over a stile, follow a path by the hedge, open a gate, cross a green meadow, and — who would have thought it ? — there was Molly's house ; and nobody could have supposed, seeing its gray roof from the road, that this was the way to reach it. Still it was the only way, and a very picturesque one, though Stokes, the road-mender, often thought it more toilsome than picturesque as he limped home after his hard day's work. Had not the cottage stood just where it did, however, a cripple with so poorly paid a trade could never have afforded to live in it, for in size and beauty it was suitable for a far more prosperous person.

The house was such an one as you would like to make in miniature, were your fingers sufficiently deft, and when it was finished you

would naturally set it on a shelf under glass for the admiration of the casual visitor. It was of deep, dark-red brick, its roof of gray slates so old that they waved up and down in gentle undulations, their crests touched with orange-yellow moss here and there. A great bunch of stonecrop hung from the eaves, coal-black beams ran through the brickwork, the gable was of ebony blackness, and the tiny, diamond-paned windows were half overgrown with creepers. The entire rear end of the house was cloaked with ivy that climbed to the ridgepole and hung there in great festoons waving in the breeze, — not branches of ordinary ivy, by any means, but real trees with trunks a foot in diameter.

The low front door, where a cage of doves hung, was completely overgrown by grapevines, good proof that visitors seldom crossed the threshold, and the garden, a tangle of poppies, rhubarb, sweet-peas, nasturtiums, and currant bushes, was shaded by a splendid oak-tree.

There was a tiny vegetable garden, too,



inclosed by a hedge of thorn, and the wild honeysuckle had wandered in from the fields and threaded the thorn through and through with its blossoms of pink and cream-color.

Beyond the cottage stood a pile of fagots, — slender twigs tied up in bundles and built into a great stack, whose steep roof to shed the rain was made of some of the bundles placed end to end, their tips interlaced and firmly wedged together. Molly had a right to regard these fagots with some pride, for she had picked up and tied every one of them herself when Farmer Martin of the Orchard House cut off one of his wood-lots in the spring.

Molly was only eleven years old, but she could work as well as play, you see, and it was fortunate that she could, for she was her father's housekeeper, as well as his companion and his dear little daughter.

"No one ever had such a wonderful child," he used to say ; and Molly on her side, if she did not say it, thought that there never was such another wonderful father.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RED BANDANA

THE festivity under the oak-tree had not been so largely attended as to prove exhausting, and the skylarks next day were just sleepily looking over their music and deciding on the first number for the morning concert, when the most wonderful child in the world clattered downstairs to make the fire. There was the kettle to boil and the table to lay and father's dinner to put up, and altogether quite enough to do for even a grown-up pair of hands with their attendant feet and guardian head.

Breakfast over, the dinner was packed into a large flat basket made of rushes, and father strapped it on his shoulders like a knapsack, having already looked over his tools and put them in first. Then his leather knee-shields were tied on over his gray corduroy trousers,

and he set off to his work across the green meadow, through the gate, along the path by the hedge, over the stile, by the rye-field, and down the steps to the road.

He was almost out of sight when Molly spied his wire goggles on the table, and catching them up, went flying after him, for he must have those at any cost. All day long he sat, rain or shine, on the heaps of stones by the wayside, deftly breaking them into small pieces with his hammer, and the green goggles both shaded his eyes and protected them from the flying splinters of rock and sharp-edged particles of dust.

Oh, but it was lovely in the green field when Molly ran back, and what fun it would have been to have stayed there and let the dishcloths do their proper work and the broom attend to its own sweeping, tasks which in fairyland these articles always perform without supervision. The hedges were so high and the trees so thick on all four sides of the field that she felt as if she were in an immense green box with a blue cover of sky,

and only the occasional glint of a far-off red roof showed that there was any one in the world save herself and the birds and the rabbits.

Still, lingering in the field meant further delay in reaching the Orchard House, where she went for the milk every morning; and as it held a large family, plenty of children, and much pleasant noise and bustle, it was a very attractive spot to the solitary little girl.

In spite of her haste, the red cottage floor was well swept and the dishes nicely washed when at last Molly locked the door behind her and with the key in her pocket ran away on her errand. Farmer Martin's cows were feeding in his green meadows as she passed, the quails were calling in the rye, and a whole family of pheasants started up before her with a sudden whir and beat of wings, as she left the road and climbed the last stile.

Across the way from the stone farmhouse was a quiet, grass-bordered pool shaded by trees, and a lovely feathered company of ducks and ducklings, geese and goslings, were swim-

ming in it as she approached, all quack, quack, quacking, standing on their heads with their orange legs in the air, sipping the water, and preening their feathers in an ecstasy of enjoyment. Molly would gladly have stayed there for an hour, for she loved all living things, but the Orchard House seemed equally attractive. Scarlet and pink geraniums were blooming behind its shining lattices, there was a bewildering garden in front, fragrant with sweet-peas, peonies, poppies, and tall stalks of waxen lilies, and best of all, a white-headed baby with round red cheeks played on the doorstep.

“Robbie, Robbie!” called Molly, waving her tin pail; and the child flourished his bare brown arms in the air and toddled toward her.

“Is that you, Molly Stokes?” cried Mrs. Martin from her ironing-table. “You’re late to-day. I wish you’d stay a little while, — Robbie’s so good with you, — and take him out while I finish this work. Here’s a cake for you both. I’ll call you when it’s time to go home.”



No wonder the child was good with Molly, for she was an attentive nurse and led him to all sorts of interesting places, — to the duck-pond, to the orchard, to the pig-pens, to the shippens or cow-stables, and finally to the farmyards where the hens were scratching. There were great haystacks there, like gigantic yellow beehives set on circular wooden bases with legs, looking for all the world as if they were just ready to stalk abroad over the country, and there were ricks of hay partly used up, exactly like huge yellow loaves of bread with smooth slices twelve feet square cut off them. The haymakers were at work, the distant grain-fields were turning deep yellow and orange, and there was so much to see that Molly could not help being sorry when Mrs. Martin called from the house and she saw the milk-pail shining in her hands.

The sun was very hot on the homeward way, and when she reached the steps in the steep bank, the little girl climbed them slowly, with a sigh of weariness. As she skirted the hedge a glint of scarlet under the branches a



little ahead caught her eye, and running along and peeping underneath, what do you suppose she saw there ?

“ My stars ! ” she cried, and, dropping on her knees, cried again, “ My stars ! Well, I never ! ”

No, of course she never, — whatever it is the expression means, nor I never, nor you never, — for, wonderful sight, to the full as strange in that place as a roaring lion, or a megalosaurus, was a sleeping baby ! No, certainly she did n’t believe it, and nobody would have believed it ; but in spite of all contrary opinions, the baby was there, a child of eighteen months, perhaps, fair-haired, pink-cheeked, and fast asleep on a red bandana handkerchief.

Molly’s first step, after she had touched the sleeper and found him real, a thing which she hardly expected, was to run to the stile and look up and down the road. No, nobody was in sight, and she had met no one as she came from the Orchard House. She traversed the field in every direction, calling as loudly as she could ;

she ran as far as her home, in mortal fear that the small stranger would disappear in her absence, and returned to find him, wakened by her voice, rubbing his eyes, and much disposed to cry. Then all the mother in Molly's heart came with a rush to the surface. She pulled him carefully out from under the branches, straightened his dusty, shabby frock, smoothed his hair, and hugged and kissed him till his whimpers of "Mammy" died away and he began to laugh and to hug her in return. The frolic had not long gone on, though, when baby began to remember his material wants and to call loudly for "Mi'k, mi'k, b'ed an' mi'k!"

What was this little good Samaritan to do under the circumstances? She ran again to the road and looked and called, but seeing no one and knowing she could never get the heavy child as far as the Orchard House, she decided to take him home with her and let her father find out at night where he came from, if no one had called for him in the mean time.

She tied the red handkerchief to a branch in the hedge, and partly breaking it, turned it as a signal toward her own home, whose roof could be seen in the distance ; then sometimes leading, sometimes carrying her unexpected visitor, she climbed the stile, followed the path, and disappeared through the gate leading to the green meadow.

## CHAPTER III

### THE STORY OF THE DOCTOR AND THE CON- STABLE

“WHERE can my Molly be?” murmured the road-mender anxiously, as he opened the gate and saw no little figure flying down the path to meet him. “Why, I’ve never known her to fail of coming, rain or shine, these two years. Where can she be?” And he hurried along to the kitchen door. He opened it, and a long “Well, well, well, Molly, what now?” sounded from his lips, and “Wherever did that baby come from?” he cried in astonishment.

There was a bright fire in the open range, and on the little iron shelves about it sat not only the teapot and the teakettle, but a porringer of milk. Molly and the cat were in a heap on the floor in front of the fire, and with them, cooing and laughing, was a real,

veritable, flesh-and-blood baby. The waif looked up and lisped out, "Dada! Dada!" but the impressions linked with the name were evidently far from pleasant ones, for he at once put his arm over his eyes and prudently crawled behind a chair.

"I found him myself under the hedge when I came home from the farm this morning," cried Molly, running to her father's side; "he was fast asleep there on a red handkerchief, and I tied it to the hedge and turned the branch this way to show where he'd gone."

"Under the hedge! Asleep on a handkerchief!" repeated Stokes in a bewildered way, as if he could n't believe his ears. "Well, child, what will you find next?" And it was no wonder he asked, for at different times she had brought home a wounded dove, the cat now rubbing against his legs, two stray dogs, and a broken-winged pheasant.

"And I looked all up and down the road, father, and all over the fields, and I called and called, and nobody answered, and then the



MOLLY, THE CAT, AND A REAL BABY





baby woke up and cried," Molly hurried on breathlessly, "and I had to bring him home."

"Well, if that's not the strangest thing I ever heard of in my life!" exclaimed the road-mender, sinking into a chair. "And you saw nobody and heard nobody, and nobody's been here after him?"

"No, father, no one at all, and baby's been so good and taken a lot of bread and milk, and he's called for his mother once in a while, but he has n't cried, and can't we keep him, father, for always?"

"Keep him!" echoed the road-mender. "Why, somebody's been looking for him all day, I dare say, and there'll be a fine hue and cry in the village to-morrow, though why any one in his senses should carry a child up those steps and put him to sleep in a rye-field is more than I can tell. Come here, little chap!" and he held out his hand and snapped his fingers at the tiny creature gazing at him from behind the chair-bars.

"Why, I believe he's afraid of you, father," cried Molly, laughing.

“Looks like it,” he answered. “He acts as if he’s had good reason to be afraid of somebody. But let’s have some supper, my girl, and then I’ll hobble up to the Orchard House and see what they know about this matter.”

The baby was asleep in Molly’s bed, and she was sitting in the kitchen doorway half asleep herself, when the tap of her father’s wooden leg sounded again on the pathway.

“No,” he called as soon as he came in sight, “the Martins have n’t heard of any lost child and don’t know what to make of the affair, and I went up to Cobhurst afterwards, and they are just as much at sea there as the rest of us. The baby’ll have to stay where he is to-night anyway. I’ve sent word to Stevens in the village about him.”

“Oh, father! what for?” cried Molly in a trembling voice. “You won’t let the constable take him away, will you?”

“Why, when a child is lost, your first duty is to tell the constable, or how are his parents to find him?” said her father kindly, smooth-

ing her hair. "Well, my dear, and is the little fellow asleep?"

"Oh, yes, he's just as good as gold, and he's asleep in my bed. Come up and see him, daddy!" And she pressed her cheek against her father's hand.

Breakfast was hardly over next morning when Mrs. Martin arrived at the cottage to inspect the waif, whom she found grubbing in the earth around the doorstone as happy and unconcerned as if a large family and troops of friends had been at his command.

"He's a fine child, Stokes," cried the farmer's wife, kneeling down beside him, "and he never belonged to any tramp, for his clothes are all mended up well, and he's been kept pretty clean if he is shabby. Now come, Molly, and let's hear all about how you found him," putting her arm around the baby. "Give us a kiss, little one. What's your name?"

"I can't make out his name at all," said Molly, "he can't say anything plain but 'Mammy' and 'Daddy' and 'kitty.' I found

him just under the hedge over by the rye-field, and he 's so sweet, and I do wish father 'd let me keep him, if they can't find his mother."

"What 's this about a baby you 've found, Stokes?" called a deep voice at this moment, and above the garden hedge rose the tall hat of the village doctor.

The road-mender hobbled to greet him, and told the tale while the visitor, pacing up and down by his side, listened gravely, and coming to the threshold at the end, lifted the child in his arms, despite his struggles, and smoothed the hair back from his forehead.

"H'm, h'm, it 's a sad story," he said, shaking his head as he set the little one down, "but I should n't wonder if we had the other end of it in the village."

"Why, how 's that, doctor?" cried Mrs. Martin, pressing closer, and Molly and her father listened eagerly.

"Well, it seems that the constable — and he 's coming out by and by, Stokes — saw a woman late yesterday afternoon wandering

down the village street in an aimless kind of way and staggering in her gait a little. He thought at first she had been drinking, but coming nearer, he saw that she was very white and her eyes had a queer look about them. He could n't get her to say anything he could understand, but he persuaded her to go home with him, for she seemed hardly able to stand, and his wife made her lie down, and they sent for me at once. But you see I was ten miles away on another case, and by the time I reached the poor creature it was too late to do anything. There was very little I could have done, anyway. She must have been almost gone when Stevens found her, but she never had her senses a minute, and did n't speak a word they could make out."

"And you think she was this poor child's mother?" whispered Stokes in an awe-stricken tone, as the baby, quite regardless of the conference and bubbling over with laughter, chased the cat around the currant bushes.

"There is some reason to think so, but no proof, of course," answered the doctor.



"When you find a strange woman and a strange baby near each other on the same day, and nobody claims either one, it's safe to suppose they belong together. We shall probably hear more of the story, though, for I'll advertise in the papers and see if any one claims the child."

"Poor woman!" sighed Mrs. Martin, brushing her hand over her eyes as the doctor left them, "who knows but she had them at home that ill used her, and she just took the child and ran away with him?"

"That'll be it," exclaimed Stokes, "and she fell ill on the road and clean lost her senses."

"And maybe she thought she'd go and buy something to eat for the baby," added Molly eagerly, "and she saw our steps and came up them and put the little darling under the hedge to keep him safe."

"Blessed lamb, see how happy he is!" cried tender-hearted Mrs. Martin. "He does n't know what he's lost, not he. Shall I take him back with me, Molly, till the con-

stable comes, for I've my work to do and I must be running home."

"Oh, no, no, Mrs. Martin, please not, he's so good with me," pleaded Molly, her eyes filling with tears in a moment.

"There, there, child, don't cry about it," said the good woman, bustling to the door. "You need n't worry. There's enough of us now at the Orchard House in all conscience, and I'm not any too anxious to add to the number. I'll send you down some more milk by and by and some of Robbie's clothes to give the baby a change. Good-by, little mother!"

Never before had the red cottage been favored with so many visitors, for Mrs. Martin was hardly gone before the upright, martial figure of the constable appeared in sight. His fine height, broad shoulders, speckless uniform, shining belt buckles, and polished boots proclaimed his proud position as servant of Her Majesty Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Empress of India; but when your eye traveled upward to his pale blue eyes, his square red face and heavy features, it seemed

clear at once that he could hardly be expected to throw much light on the perplexing affair of the foundling.

He repeated the doctor's story, staring in a puzzled way at the baby the while, as if he had been a bear with two heads, or some kind of strange monster, and said he supposed somebody would come for the child before long, or else the parish would decide what to do with him.

"You could n't keep him, Stokes, for a day or two more, could you?" he added slowly. "Of course your girl here is n't much of a size, but my wife's tired out taking care of the woman last night, and then there's the funeral to look after, you see, and we've got such a family."

"Could we manage to keep the boy a little while longer, Molly?" asked the roadmender with a half-smile, as he watched the little mother feeding her charge with great spoonfuls of bread and milk.

"Oh, father!" was Molly's only answer, but it was accompanied with such a blush

and smile of joy that Stokes looked satisfied, and as he accompanied the constable across the meadow he murmured in his ear :

“She ’ll take care of that baby, sir, as he ’s never been taken care of since he was born. She ’s the most wonderful child in the world, sir !”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STOKES FAMILY ENLARGES

THE sharp, ringing note of iron on stone sounded clear in the hot sunshine as a pony-carriage rolled along the road one afternoon in the direction of the red cottage.

“Ah, there’s Stokes now!” said the rector of the parish, drawing in his fat little beast. “Good-afternoon, my man.”

“Good-afternoon, sir. You’ll excuse my rising, sir. You know this leg of mine” —

“Don’t mention it, Stokes. I was going along toward your house to see if I could find out where you were working. I wanted to have a talk with you about that unfortunate child that you found a fortnight or so ago. Nothing has been heard about it, I understand.”

“Nothing, sir. We’ve sent notice in every direction, and the doctor has advertised, but

no word has come. The baby might have dropped straight out of the skies for all anybody knows of how he got here."

"It's a strange story," mused the rector. "I suppose there's little doubt that the woman who died in the village was the mother."

"We think so, sir; but you see there is no way of finding out for sure. She and the child must have come from somewhere, it would seem, and been bound for somewhere else, but nobody appears to have valued them much at either end of the line, or they'd make inquiry."

"It would seem so, yes, certainly," said the rector. "But then the poor creature may have been left quite alone in the world by some strange chance. It's impossible to tell; I fear quite impossible now. But what's this I hear, Stokes, about your wanting to keep the boy?"

"Well, sir," said the road-mender, tapping the heap of stones in an embarrassed kind of way, "I don't know but it seems a strange thing for a poor man like me, and a cripple,



too ; but there does n't seem to be anybody else much set on having the little chap, and my girl she 's just wild about him."

"But can she give him proper care, Stokes, with you away all day as you are?"

"Well, there, sir, I just wish you could have seen him a fortnight ago and could see him to-day. He 's half again the size he was, and his cheeks as red as apples ; and Mrs. Martin, up there at the Orchard House, she 's sent him clothes, and tells us just what to give him to eat and all, and Molly does manage in a way that would surprise you ; but then you know what I always say, sir, — she is the most wonderful child !"

"I know that," said the rector, smiling ; "but you don't want to keep such a wonderful child out of school when it begins again."

"Oh, no, sir ; not by any means. I don't want to do that, but Mrs. Martin says — she 's a good woman if ever there was one — that Molly may leave the boy with her every day as she goes by and call for him

at noon. I don't send her in the afternoon, sir, — it's too far."

"Well, that seems very well planned," said the rector thoughtfully, "but I don't know that it's prudent for you to burden yourself with another child, my man. No doubt I can find a good home for the baby by making some inquiries. Would it not be best for you to let me take the matter in charge, supposing no one ever claims him?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Stokes slowly, looking up into the kind blue eyes above him. "You see, besides that I can't bear to disappoint my girl — who's a lonely little thing, and who's set her heart on the child — you see, I can't help thinking that there was some kind of meaning in the baby's being left at my door, as you might say. What led that poor woman — if it was she that did it — to climb those steps and lay him in my path? It seems as if the Lord remembered that there was room in my house, and that I had my health if I was a poor man, and He sent me a charge to keep."

“‘He setteth the solitary in families,’” murmured the rector reverently, “‘He bringeth out those which are bound with chains.’ . . . You may be right, Stokes, and I like your feeling. The Lord’s ways are not as our ways, and we know that the best way to bring up a child is not to lap him in luxury. We will leave the matter as it is for the present, then, and if you change your mind you can let me know,” gathering up the reins as he spoke. “Come, Robin!” to the fat pony nibbling at the roadside grass, “we must get on. Mind you tell me, Stokes, if you need anything for the little fellow at any time,” and he drove away between the green hedgerows.

“He’s a good man,” murmured the roadmender, falling to with a tap, tap, tap on the heap of stones, — “a good man, and it’s a privilege to belong to his parish.”

Afternoon tea-time again at the red cottage and another party under the great oak-tree. The skylarks hang fluttering in mid-air in an ecstasy of song, the doves coo in the

grove, the rabbits frisk up and down the ivy-covered bank by the spring, and rose-leaves like pink fairy boats float on its smooth surface. A white handkerchief is laid on the moss beneath the tree, and there are two cracked saucers upon it and two blue mugs with chipped edges. Down the wavy green path from the house sweeps Molly, flower-crowned and white-robed again, and bearing proudly in her hands two slices of bread and a jug of milk. The Queen must be having very grand company to-day, if one may judge from the extent of the preparations, and everything is real, too. Real is the tablecloth, real are the dishes, real are the things to eat, and, best of all, a real, truly visitor is the laughing baby who runs to meet the Queen, gurgling out, "Molly! Molly! Molly!" and pulling at the robe of state.

The girlish sovereign sets down the bread and milk and falls on her knees by the child.

"Baby shall be Queen," she says; "my darling, precious baby shall be Queen this time." And transferring the floral crown to

his fair head and wrapping the counterpane about his shoulders, she sets him on the green throne under the oak-tree.

“Now baby is Queen,” she says, handing him the alder twig, “and Molly is the lady come to take tea.”

MAUREEN BAWN





# MAUREEN BAWN

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## CHAPTER I

### SUPPING SORROW

MAUREEN sat on the shore of the lake with her bare legs and slender bare feet stretched out in front of her and her ragged red frock scarcely covering her knees. Her shawl had slipped to her shoulders and above it rose her fair head like a primrose from its leaves, — a head of curls, waves, rings, tendrils, each separate shining hair a thread of spun glass and the whole mass bright and glistening as a bowl of soap bubbles.

The water lapped softly on the shore, the missel-thrushes sang in the arbutus coverts, beyond the lake rose a range of purple mountains and hills covered with ling and bell-heather ; but Maureen Bawn heard nothing

but her own sad thoughts and saw nothing but her shining needles and the long gray stocking she was knitting. Even of these she only caught passing glimpses, for her great eyes, blue as Killarney's waters, brimmed over with tears, and plash! there went another on the faded shawl as she sobbed, "Och! What'll we do widout him at all!"

The mere thought of doing without him, whoever he might be, was so much too bitter to endure that Maureen's head went down on her knees in a burst of grief and the knitting dropped by her side unheeded. "Sure, was n't he the darlin'!" she cried, half-stifled by her tears, and "the darlin'!" . . . "darlin'!" sounded in sympathetic echo from across the water.

Twilight was creeping on when at last the child raised her head, wiped her eyes, and with a start at the setting sun and the pink haze in which Carran Tual floated, caught up her neglected work and bounded along the slope to the cabin in the distance. Built of rough stone, with the plaster which covered it broken

and discolored here and there, with thatched roof, one door, and but one narrow unglazed window, it looked a humble shelter enough; but it was Maureen's home, and there she and her brother Teigue lived with their grandmother. As you drew near you noted that the thatch was ragged and broken, that weeds sprouted from its shining, tawny surface, that a very garden of yellow flowers nodded near the ridgepole, and a great stone laid here and there showed that the roof had been weighted to insure it against the winter winds.

All looked neglected enough without, but thick blue smoke curled lazily upward from the chimney, betokening a warm hearth-stone, and through the open door shone the deep red glow of a turf fire, where by a bubbling iron pot hanging from a crane sat a white-capped old dame, sipping a cup of tea.

In the straw in front of the cabin fowls were scratching, but as the patter of Maureen's bare feet was heard, a fussily clucking hen with a brood of long-legged chickens vanished into the gloom of the interior, a turkey with

languid, high-bred air stepped delicately after, and a fat duck or two waddled behind, stooping as they crossed the threshold.

“Maureen, where is it ye’ve been at all?” asked her grandmother quickly, as the child entered in the rear of the procession.

“Down by the wather knittin’, granny.”

“It’s more cryin’ ye’ve done than knittin’, be the looks o’ yer eyes, asthore, an’ well I know ye’ve a sorry heart the day. Over and over agin I’ve been sayin’ it to meself as I sat here wid me tay, ‘Sure, ’t is Maureen that’ll miss him; ’t was a wonderful crathur he was all out.’”

“Tell me how it was again, granny,” sighed Maureen, sinking on the mud floor by the fire.

“There do be nothin’ to tell thin, at all, at all. In the mornin’ when ye went to the town he was alive an’ that hearty, runnin’ in an’ out here, an’ wrigglin’ the tail of him, an’ when the pitatys was boiled an’ I went to give him his dinner, sure, there he lay in the straw an’ ’t was dead an’ cowl’d he was intirely!”

“Would the Good People be ill-wishin’ him,

granny?" whispered the child in an awed tone.

"Sure, what at all would be ailin' the Good People at us thin? Don't we be lavin' thim their male an' their fresh wather every night, an' 'tis thim that knows well enough we're wantin' the milk to give thim. No, 'tis dead he is, an' whatever tuk him it's niver a know I know, an' where's the rint to come from, wid me Dinny sick on me in Ameriky an' me Maggy wantin' a place these three months?"

"Don't ye cry then, granny darlin', don't ye cry!" urged Maureen, patting the old knees, and forgetting her own sorrow in anxiety to comfort. "Sure, there's more pigs than that wan in the counthry-side, an' Teigue'll be earnin' the good money now, an' I'll be knittin' every day, an' we'll buy ye another, granny, please God."

"'Tis the good childer ye are thin, the two o' ye!" exclaimed granny, cheering up a little and finishing her tea, "but take yer bite o' supper, Maureen, alanna, an' we'll be sayin' our prayers an' gettin' to bed wid us."



By the time the scanty meal was eaten all was still outside, and drowsy clucks and chirps and twitters within the room announced that the whole family of fowls had entered and disposed themselves to rest in their accustomed places. Maureen closed the door, barred the heavy shutter, said her prayers, devoutly kneeling before her little image of the Virgin, made her simple toilet for the night, and crawled in beside granny on the old home-made wooden bedstead, under the patched calico counterpane. The red, unwinking eye of the fire still glowed in the little room and partly illumined its long rough table, its two chairs with rope seats, its rude chest of drawers, its dresser with shining plates and saucers ranged upon the shelves and pitchers and cups below, and its clumsy ladder leading to the loft above where Teigue was wont to sleep. But Teigue was in his teens and a wage-earner now, and he was away in the Gap of Dunloe, leading ponies for the summer tourists, as they traversed the rocky defile on their way to Upper Lake.

Maureen thought of him as she lay beside her sleeping grandmother, and wept again as she pictured his sorrow at the sudden and unexpected death of that family friend, the pig, a beast who had given every promise, even that morning, of living a happy life surrounded with affectionate friends, and when he had attained maturity, of selling at a price more than sufficient to pay the modest rent.

“Sure ’t is suppin’ sorrow wid a spoon o’ grief we are,” sobbed Maureen softly, in the dark, “an’ Teigue there in the Gap an’ no one to be tellin’ him at all !”

## CHAPTER II

### KILLARNEY MARKET-DAY

“PEE, pee, pee,” sounded fretfully from the turkeys; “Tut, tut,” clucked the anxious hens; “Twitter, twitter, twitter,” chirruped all the chickens; and soft quacks from the geese and ducks filled up the spaces of the sound.

“Why, ’t is mornin’ already!” thought Maureen, lifting herself on her elbow, “an’ why do I be feelin’ so sorry like? Och, ’t is the pig thin, poor crathur!” and she looked half disposed to begin the day by crying; but the light stealing in through the cracks in the barred window showed her a restless group of fowls by the doorsill waiting anxiously to be let out, and she crept softly over her grandmother and released the delighted company.

There is not much time lost in dressing when you have no shoes and stockings, no ribbons and laces, and no choice of frocks; so

it seemed hardly a moment before Maureen was arrayed for the day, had thrown a few sods of turf on the still smouldering fire, and with the kettle in her hand was climbing up the projecting stones in the farmer's wall near by, to fill it at the spring-well in the field.

It was early yet, — so early that the dew lay sparkling on the stack of turf Teigue had piled beside the door, and on the leaves of the potatoes and turnips which the same faithful hand had planted in “lazy beds” about the cabin, while a sheen like a silver frost covered the short grass which the bare feet brushed along their way. The Black Reeks of The Mac-Gillicuddy rose in solemn silence far across the lake, just touched on highest peaks by a glint of the rising sun; the ripening grain-fields shone yellow here and there, for these were August days; and in sharp contrast stretches of bog lay darkly in between.

Just beyond the spring-well, a fairy ring rose from among the grasses; and Maureen knelt down beside it, hoping, as she had hoped so many times before, that some wee reveler

might have flung aside his cloak there, the night being warm, and forgotten it when cock-crow sounded. Alas ! no velvet garment of emerald hue was to be seen among the grass-blades, brush them aside as she might, and the child took up her burden again and hurried disappointed down the hill.

Hardly was the kettle hung upon the crane when she came out again to drink in the morning sweetness and freshness ; and while her grandmother's voice sounded from within as, murmuring, she told her beads, the child sat in the doorway and smoothed as best she might the wonderful yellow curls which had earned her, the village over, the name of Maureen Bawn, — little fair Mary.

Across the way, in a long pool of clear brown water edged with tall rushes, cat-tails, and waving marsh-grass, the ducks and geese were diving and gossiping, and among them, sociably enough, a flock of water-hens was swimming about. The neighboring farmer's small black Kerry cattle were drinking at the brink and hobbled goats fed on the juicy

grass at the margin. Here, in the early morning hours, before the sun's heat invited to repose, the dear departed piggy had been wont to rove, and here he had delighted at times to descend upon and rout the unsuspecting fowls, brushing them out of his way with determined black snout and twinkling eye. Maureen's heart was dwelling regretfully on these tender memories when her grandmother called her to breakfast, and she relished to the full, in spite of lingering sadness, the simple meal of buttermilk and warm bread baked in an iron pot heaped up and over with sods of turf.

It was well that Terence Cronin of Muckross Farm was a neighbor of the Widow O'Brien's, for so she could procure not only buttermilk much cheaper than elsewhere, but obtain many kindly services sadly needed by a lone old woman with two young grandchildren dependent on her, and her only remaining son and daughter far off in America. It is true that Dennis was the best son and Maggy the best daughter, as Bridget O'Brien often said,



that woman ever had, "the saints bless an' save thim!" but now and again post-office orders would cease coming for a little, as indeed was happening now, and then Farmer Cronin could be trusted to keep off starvation, for it was himself that was very liberal with whatever.

It was market-day in the village of Killarney, and breakfast over, Bridget bustled about, filling her basket with the long woollen stockings of gray, white, and shaded purple which she and Maureen had been knitting, laying a clutch of eggs on a bed of green leaves in a smaller basket for her companion to carry, and tucking under the child's arm at the last moment a dejected young fowl with pinioned legs, which was to be offered for sale at the Inn.

Thus weighted, the pair set out along the lovely road bordered by dykes topped with high green hedges wreathed with honeysuckle and ripening blackberries. The ground below was soft with grass and bright with blossoms, and Maureen, who was a natural lover of

flowers, had soon garlanded her basket with ivy, in spite of young Speckle under her arm, and crowned it with yellow gorse, blue-bonnets, and loose strife.

All sorts of wayfarers they met on the road. Here trudged by, with a "God save you!" as she passed, a barefooted woman, her creel on her back, on her way to the bog; here stood a dark-haired girl binding sheaves in a harvest-field, the scarlet handkerchief wound about her head gleaming through the yellow wheat and her ragged dress looped above a scarlet petticoat; and there, a sturdy old dame, in a heavy black cloak and cap as white as snow, came along leading a donkey-cart on which a white-haired man sat smoking, his legs stretched out and his hands crossed on his stick.

Quiet for a moment, and then a long car rattled by filled with tourists, and Maureen dropped her eyes and shrouded her flower-like head still further in her shawl, for they stared at one so, these travelers. Again, with slow creak of wheels a sleek, black donkey driven

by a small boy came in sight. The cart was as tiny as boy and beast, and on one side of it sat a sweet-faced mother, whose bright green gown swept the dust as she rode and who held in her arms a yellow-haired baby, one of those angel children with eyes of limpid blue, only seen in Ireland.

The edge of the town was reached "at long last," as they say in Kerry, and a general atmosphere of excitement was quickly felt. Through a dark cabin doorway on the outskirts a frisky white calf suddenly galloped, a donkey just unharnessed trotted through a butcher's shop to his stable in the rear, and a dirty, curly-haired, laughing boy ran down the narrow lane clutching an equally dirty black pig by the tail. Marketing, they could soon see, had begun in earnest; and the widow hurried to the nearest unoccupied corner and sat her down on the curbstone, her basket of stockings by her side, bidding Maureen hasten to the Inn with the fowl and the eggs.

Donkey-carts were coming in from every direction, some of them seeming small enough

for toys, the little beasts guided here by an old man with a stick, there by a wrinkled white-haired crone, again by a barefoot girl swathed in a faded shawl.

Women at the street-corners were selling apples, — “Sugar apples, my lady, sugar apples!” others were urging the merits of their creels of cabbages on the passers-by, and through the throng slipped now and then a frouzy old woman, with bleared red-rimmed eyes, tangled white locks, and grimy cap, a skinny fowl held under her arm. A blue-eyed young matron, with a splendid mass of dark-red waving hair, sat on the edge of a table knitting, with a goodly store of apples and piles of round cakes sprinkled with pink and white sugar pellets spread out around her, while on the sidewalk was set the remainder of her stock in trade, — basins of pigs’ feet, among which her babies tumbled. Stalls presided over by more prosperous owners were set along the sidewalk laden with fruit and vegetables, or crocheted laces and woolen stockings, and suddenly amid a crowd of eager women a

donkey-cart laden with new potatoes appeared. Such excitement, gesticulation, bargaining, and chaffering followed that one might have thought the cart loaded with diamonds or gold nuggets, and Bridget had risen to her feet and was about to join the throng, when a tourist, attracted by her cleanly dress, snowy cap, and fine dignified old face, stopped to inquire the price of her stockings. The timely appearance of this buyer, as well as the merit of her wares, soon attracted other purchasers, and before noon the basket was empty and the old woman, delighted with her good fortune, had stepped into a friend's shop to wait for her little Goldilocks somewhat apart from the general babble, noise, and confusion.

Maureen had not at first been successful in the sale of young Speckle and the clutch of eggs, for the Killarney Inn was already well provided when she appeared; but resolute to earn something, at least, that day toward the purchase of another darling pig, she went with her basket from door to door, and finally, very warm and tired, disposed of her last egg



and turned her steps toward the market-place again.

She was just passing the stall under the wall of Innisfalen House, where the man sells the shillelaghs and walking-sticks, when a red-cheeked girl ran down a stone-paved lane and almost into her arms.

“Sure, ’t is you, Eliza !” cried Maureen.

“Yes, it’s me,” replied her friend hastily, and regardless of grammar, “and oh, Maureen, have you heard the news?”

“An’ how will I be knowin’ at all till you tell me what it is?” asked Maureen with a twinkle in her eye.

“And if I tell you what it is, it won’t be news any longer,” answered Eliza with equal quickness. “But listen ! you know the Flower Show they’re to have next week at Innisfalen House?”

“I do that,” said Maureen, for everybody always knew what the Earl and Countess of Innisfalen, the great people of the countryside, had planned to have in the way of public entertainments.



“ Well, of course there’s going to be prizes for the neatest cottages and the best cottage gardens and the best window-boxes and the best potted plants and all those things that they always have, and oh, Maureen ! ” she went on, digressing for a moment from her piece of news, “ I don’t believe there can be in the whole of Kerry a handsomer white geranium than mine, and my window-box that father put up for me is just a picture, he says.”

“ Sure, ’t is a grand place it does be havin’ to grow in ! ” exclaimed Maureen admiringly, for Eliza was the daughter of an English groom at Innisfalen House and lived over the stables.

“ I know,” said Eliza, with a compassionate glance at her friend, “ and that’s what I’ve been thinking about, for you have n’t any plants, or any garden, or any window-boxes, and I did n’t see how you could compete for a prize, but now ! ” and here she clapped her hands in excitement, “ my lady has said this morning that she’ll give a prize of money herself to the child who’ll bring the best bouquet

of wild flowers, and one for the best bunch of ferns, and the best bunch of grasses ! ”

Maureen’s eyes danced suddenly and a smile, bright as the sun after a shower, spread from her rosy lips to her rose-leaf cheek.

“ Sure, ’t is she that ’s the rale quality, an’ granny always does be sayin’ so,” she murmured, “ an’ ’t is she that has the kind heart intirely ” —

“ Yes, my father says so too, and he ’s seen all the great ladies in London,” said Eliza; “ but I thought of you as soon as I heard about the prizes, for you know where all the wild things grow, and my mother says she never saw a little maid that could make up such a lovely bunch of flowers.”

Maureen blushed with pleasure under the praises of her admiring friend, but said no word, though her head was full of plans and projects.

“ Mother just spared me for a minute,” Eliza went on, “ to see if I could find you down in the town, and I can’t stay, but you won’t forget, will you, Maureen ? ”

“Forgit!” exclaimed Maureen. “Forgit, is it? An’ how would I be forgittin’ a thing like that at all?”

Eliza hastened up the lane again, but as she reached the gate at the head, a sudden thought appeared to strike her, and she turned and shouted a confused something of which only two words, “Teigue” and “hornpipe,” could be clearly heard.

“That’s what she’ll be askin’,” said Maureen eagerly to herself, waving her hand in answer. “She’ll be askin’ could I get word to Teigue an’ could he thry for the hornpipe prize. Indade thin, an’ I’ll see what I can do, for no matther if it’s Teigue or me gets the prize, we’ll buy the pig for granny just the same.”

## CHAPTER III

### THE LUCK OF THE O'DONOGHUE

"God save ye, Misthress O'Brien, mam," said a tremulous old voice at the door of the cabin.

"God save ye kindly, Michael," answered the widow from her post by the window.

"'T is a foine day we 're havin', mam, an' would ye be afther goin' to the bog this mornin' at all?"

"Sure, we 're not needin' any turf, Michael; there's a grand stack there forninst the door, — though ye can't see it, sorra the day! but Maureen 'll be foine an' pl'ased to go wid ye. Sit ye down an' rest ye, an' I'll be callin' her."

The old man dropped his creel by the door and with tapping stick found his way to a chair, his sightless eyes wandering vacantly about him as he moved, while the widow, put-

ting aside the white sash-curtain, called from the window, "Maureen, Maureen! 'tis old Michael O'Donoghue's wantin' ye."

Quiet as she was, the child was n't "fallin' to pieces wid idleness," a fate against which her grandmother had always warned her. She had already been out for hours and had accomplished certain things which had lain on her mind since the previous day in Killarney. She had been to the Farm and interviewed one of Terence Cronin's men, who now and then was engaged to drive a party of travelers to the Gap, and had bound him over to see Teigue, should the trip be taken within a week, to tell him the tragedy of the pig's death and describe to him the glories of the coming Flower Show, laying particular stress on the money prize to be given for the best reel and hornpipe dancing. She had wandered over the hills too, while yet the day was young, and marked where the bell-heather grew deepest pink, where the ling and the yellow ragweed were in finest blossom, where the honeysuckle was most luxuriant, and the

blue-bonnets and the loosestrife most plentiful. She had noted in the cool depths of the woods where the royal fern grew tallest, and had marked an especially fine mountain ash, its graceful branches weighed down with bunches of round scarlet berries, its green leaves shading to crimson at their tips. There was a certain spurge or mountain laurel too, with exquisitely blended scarlet and white berries, which she had chanced upon as she rambled, and as she sat knitting on the stone wall she was arranging in her mind's eye a beautiful wreath of ash and laurel berries, set off with the dark glossy leaves of the ground ivy.

Her plans were not so engrossing, however, nor her interest in her knitting so absorbing, that she could not readily leave both for a morning with old Michael, for "'t was he could tell the fine old tales, an' 't was he knew all about the Good People an' how to trate thim so they'd niver bother ye at all, but maybe be friendly-like."

She slipped her hand into the old man's



and together they set off for the bog, but as they reached the road a puff of wind raised a little eddy of dust which as it went whirling along blew in Michael's face. He stopped at once and with a wave of his hand called softly, "God speed ye, gentlemin, God speed ye!"

"What is it thin, at all?" cried Maureen with wide, questioning blue eyes.

"'T is the fairies, asthore; they do be travelin' this foine mornin', an' 't is wishin' thim a safe journey I am."

Maureen looked up in the old man's face with wonder and delight. What marvelous things he knew and how happy she was to be with him that morning! It was he who had told her about the fairy host that lived up in the eagle's nest beyond the lake, and how when the bugle sounded they took up the call and, repeating it ten times over, — never less nor more, — passed it along their lines. It was he who had told her about the green bog rushes that look so innocent and simple and yet know all the fairies' doings, for it's their

fine white horses they turn into every night when the king says " Borram, borram, borram ! "

It was he who knew about the raths where " the Gentry " live when they are at home, and many a time, on fine summer evenings, had they listened together by these turf-covered mounds of earth for the sound of elfin wheels whirling below and for fairy tunes timed to the spinning. You never see the Good People, Michael had told her, you only hear them ; so you must keep your eyes closed and your ears open when you are on the watch ; and many a time had he been rewarded, he said, by the chink of golden cups, the rattle of silver dishes, and the patter of tiny feet deep down in a rath, and known that the fairies were at their revels. He had smelled too, he was positive, the reek of the wee turf fires where the fairy men lighted their pipes ; but Maureen never felt quite certain of this, for smoking must be very dangerous in a company where the ladies were all robed in butterflies' wings and fabrics of spiders' spinning.

The way to the bog seemed short with such an animated story-book by her side, and Maureen felt almost sorry when she saw the wide, deep green expanse, tufted with little hillocks here and there, and with the glint of water beside occasional black patches. Each cottage the landlord rents has its own plot of turf set off on the bog, so many yards each year, and the child knew where to guide old Michael, for his plot lay close beside their own. There were many shallow excavations where turf had been cut, and the dark, irregularly shaped sods were scattered about drying in the sun. Pools of black water lay at the bottom of these cuts, and it required some judgment to find a safe path for the old man, since he could not see, as she could, to jump from tussock to tussock of grass. When she had led him where the lighter color of the sods showed that they had been some time cut and were dried and ready for use, she helped him fill his creel, and then, while he rested and smoked his short black pipe, she wandered over the soft green grass and picked the tall spikes of pink freckled

foxglove, the pinky-purple bog heath, and the waxen cups of the bell-heather.

On the homeward way, which was somewhat longer, for Michael's back was old for the weight of so heavy a creel, and he must often sit down and rest, the talk was all of The O'Donoghue, the great Chieftain who lies with a host of his retainers beneath Killarney's waters under the thrall of the Good People. Maureen had been shown from babyhood his Table and his Wine-cellar, far off in the lake, and had even been rowed by Teigue out to his Pulpit where it is said he preaches every seven years; but as they had been told on that day that all who listen to his sermon are from that time forth enchanted, they had afterwards prudently avoided the spot.

Old Michael, as being an O'Donoghue himself, was always most eloquent about the glories of this Chieftain of long ago, and never tired of telling of his honor and virtues, his riches and magnificence. To-day his talk was all of the "Luck of The O'Donoghue," and how it was better than money, but that he,

alas! could never hope to obtain it because of his blindness, for you must see the Chieftain as he rides across the water at midnight, or dances the "Rincead fadda" on the shore, — must see him yourself and meet his eyes with yours, or else "'t is no luck at all ye'll be gettin', alanna."

"The luck of The O'Donoghue, . . . the luck of The O'Donoghue," . . . thought Maureen to herself, as she led old Michael to the half-ruined cabin where his lame wife was awaiting him. "An' why would n't I thry if I'd see him to-night, thin, an' get the luck meself? Sure, it's not afraid I'd be, with the lake so near, an' 't is nights like these that he does be ridin', they say. If I got the luck wanst, I'd be buildin' a grand cabin for granny, an' buyin' her a donkey, an' 't is a cow we'd have of our own, an' Teigue home from the Gap an' all. Sure if I don't see The O'Donoghue — rest his soul! — 't won't be for the want of thryin'."

Maureen was a determined child, gentle and yet fearless, and her curls, soft and golden as



those of a fairy-tale princess, covered a head that held decided views and opinions. She knew quite well that whatever her grandmother might think about the value of The O'Donoghue luck, or the possibility of obtaining it, she would be opposed to allowing her to go to the lake at midnight. It seemed best, since Teigue was away, to keep her plan entirely secret, since disobedience was not to be thought of, and neither could she consider for a moment giving up such a fascinating and perhaps valuable idea.

She dared not close her eyes that night as she lay beside her grandmother and listened to her quiet breathing, for fear she should sleep too long ; and when at last she slipped over the foot of the bed and tiptoed her way to the door, the hours had seemed so endless that she dreaded that it might be sunlight, not moonlight, which would meet her gaze.

No, the earth was bathed in silvery sheen, the moon rode high in a sky only dappled here and there with fleecy clouds, and flower and tree, shrub and tiny grass-blade, were still,



still, with a soft-breathing stillness never felt by day. Maureen almost feared to step lest she break the slumber of the world, and it was a relief to reach Killarney's shores and see the glimmer of the waves in the wake of the moon and hear the tiny ripples break upon the beach.

She crouched under a great rock, a forlorn, childish figure in the midnight stillness, bare-footed, bare-armed, and bare-headed, and as she waited, she hardly knew for what, her hands began to chill and tiny shivers to creep over her. She was not afraid, no, certainly she was not afraid, why should she be? but it was cold and lonely, and everything looked strange and eerie when occasional clouds stole across the moon. . . . How would The O'Donoghue come? Would a great wave lift far out in the lake, and behind it would the Chief-tain rise on his fiery horse and gallop, gallop, to the shore in a cloud of foam and mist? Would his men attend him, riding at his bridle-rein, clad in silver-shining armor as of old? Would the fairy pipes be playing, and

the harp of Erin, far down beneath the waters, sound its wild strain as the shadow forms moved on? . . . Who knew how the Chieftain's eye would flash under his dark brows? Would she dare to look upon him as he rode, as he rode?

. . . Hark! A sound of hoofs on the rocks behind her! Was the fairy train returning? No, it was only a small restless black cow, looking at her as she passed with a glance of surprise and, as Maureen felt, a touch of condemnation.

The night moved on and the air grew colder as the dawn approached, the clouds shrouded the moon more frequently, and the child began to grow heavy at heart. But see, a mist rose on the lake, and as the wind blew and tossed it about, Maureen fancied that at last she saw a majestic figure rise above it. She leaped to her feet with beating heart and strained her eyes into the distance, but at that moment of all moments a black monster of a cloud swallowed the moon entirely, and whether the sound of hoof-beats really followed and

the jingle of spurs, she was never afterward quite able to assure herself.

Long, long she waited, doubting, fearing, but whether or not the Chieftain had passed her in that moment of thick darkness, she could scarcely say. At least she had not seen him fairly, had not looked into his fierce dark eye as he galloped by. The famous Luck of The O'Donoghue was not to be hers, sorra the day! And when the dawn began to turn the night to gray, Maureen Bawn crept back to the cabin, tired, disheartened, and forlorn.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FLOWER SHOW

THE time before the great day of the Flower Show seemed to creep along snail-footed, although at any other season Maureen would have thought the days positively flew by, so full were they of plans and preparations and happy business.

The widow got out her long black broad-cloth cloak from the chest of drawers, a garment which her dear, dead husband — the peace o' Heaven be his soul's rest! — had given her forty years ago. Stirred to the depths of her gay old Irish heart by the coming festivity, she scrubbed and starched and ironed her best embroidered cap till it shone dazzling as a frost flower, and while she washed and mended Maureen's little shawl and brushed her Sunday frock, she wondered whether Dennis and Maggy would n't be sendin' her

a few shillin's belike, to buy the darlin' somethin' a bit better.

The child herself felt no lack in her proposed costume. Her dress and shawl were clean and she was to wear shoes and stockings, articles generally assumed for mass only, and giving a touch of unaccustomed elegance, she thought, to any girl's appearance. She had a clean handkerchief, granny had given her a penny to spend, and Eliza, who had twice come to hear about her plans, had invited her to call at the neat little rooms over Innisfalen stables and attend the Flower Show in her company. Granny, old Michael, and his wife were to have a lift as far as the town on Terence Cronin's long car, and that nothing might be wanting to a day promising to froth over with excitement, Teigue had sent word that 't was himself would be there, bedad, an' dance the brogues off him !

Maureen had decided, to her grandmother's unbounded astonishment, to compete for three prizes, — those offered for the best collection of wild flowers, the best bunch of ferns, and

the best of grasses. You may fall between two stools, thought the child, but you must be "an omadhaun intirely" if you lose your footing among three of them; and since it appeared probable that the Luck of The O'Donoghue was not to be hers, she had redoubled her efforts to obtain success by her own powers.

County Kerry is noted for its rare flowers, ferns, and shrubs, but within the circle of miles which her feet could travel, not one of them was unknown to Maureen Bawn; and with inborn genius for the task, she had noted when and where each variety was at its finest, under what conditions each remained freshest after plucking, and by frequent experiment had ascertained what time of day was best to arrange the bouquets.

Long before the sun glinted above the Black Reeks of The MacGillicuddy on the eventful day, soon as the head of the earliest waking thrush peeped from beneath his wing, the child was out on the hills, by the brooks, and in the arbutus coverts, and it was still the freshest hour of sparkling dawn when masses of



delicate blossoms, feathery grasses, and dewy ferns lay in the cool waters of a tiny dark cave at the lake's edge. Later on, they were sorted, those rejected which did not bear the test of full daylight, were too short of stem, or showed signs of fading; and then the golden head bent low above the treasures as she arranged and rearranged them with an eye to color, shading, beauty of position, and general effect of grace and lightness. She was only ten years old, it is true, this barefooted, ragged Irish child; but had she been twice ten, she could not have carried out her designs with greater freedom and directness, for hers was the artist touch, and those clear-shining blue eyes were the windows of an artist soul.

Her basket lined with wet moss, the three products of her skill placed therein, their stems also wrapped in moss and covered loosely with ferns and grasses, she sprinkled all carefully with cool water, and after submitting her curls to her grandmother's skillful fingers, hastily donned her Sunday frock, her shoes and stockings, and hurried off to Innisfalen House.

Eliza was waiting for her, the famous white geranium in its freshly scrubbed pot set ready on the table; and when she peeped into Maureen's basket and saw and smelled the freshness and beauty it contained, her long-drawn "O — h! m — y!" brought a flush of pride to the owner's cheek.

"Of course I'm not going to take my window-box," explained Eliza volubly, "it's too heavy, but the ladies were here yesterday to look at it. You know my lady herself and lots of others go all over the village and all around the country everywhere, judging the flowers. They're giving prizes this year for potted plants and window-boxes and bunches of garden-flowers, besides all the wild flowers, and for the best cottage gardens and the tidiest cottages and the nicest vegetables and bread and butter and cheese. My father says all the horses in the stables have run their legs off with going round judging for the prizes. But come, Maureen dear, we must hurry, or your flowers will fade."

As the two little girls left the sheltered in-

closure where the stables stood and turned into the grounds of Innisfalen House, the full glory of the gardens broke on Maureen and she stood still with admiration and wonder. There was a perfect mass of bloom on every side, nasturtiums, carnations, ferns, lilies, cacti, dahlias, mignonette, roses, phlox, and countless other flowers that the child had never seen, nor even imagined. The velvety green of the grass was green even for the Emerald Isle, and the low borders of box, the trellises wreathed with roses, the marble urns running over with blossoms, the close-set walls of cedar clipped into strange patterns, the arches through which Killarney's waters shimmered, the ivy-wreathed walls of the great, shining-windowed mansion beyond, — all the sheen and color and perfume and gayety made a picture even more beautiful than she had fancied the halls of the fairies down below.

Maureen could not speak, she could only gasp, and might have stood there for hours, had not the practical Eliza laid hands upon her and dragged her off to that part of the

grounds where the tents and stalls for the exhibition of flowers, vegetables, and needle-work were to be found.

The beautiful park was crowded with people, — white-capped old women; younger ones wrapped in gay-bordered shawls, or with a bright handkerchief thrown over their heads; shy little girls, shawl-enwrapped, and sturdy boys in clean ruffled collars, all hastening to the flower tent with small withered nosegays clutched tight in their hot hands; men in soft caps and marvelous neckties; tall helmeted policemen here and there, and a sprinkling of the gentry, whose trailing robes and flower-nodding hats, or immaculate suits of white duck, made Maureen's eyes open in amazement.

Nowhere among the groups of men and boys was Teigue to be seen, but her brother had never yet failed to keep a promise made her and the child was not uneasy, though she longed to see him. The great tent for the display of wild flowers, ferns, and grasses was surrounded with tables covered in white, which already bore numerous glass jars filled with

bouquets of various shapes and sizes. Several ladies were labeling and arranging them, and near the entrance stood a wonderful dark-eyed princess, — “it’s a princess she must be, or the Queen herself, belike,” thought Maureen, — robed in something white and soft and fluffy like the suds in granny’s washtub, and with glittering things about her neck like bright water-drops.

Eliza set down the white geranium, made a curtsy, and pushed forward Maureen, who fortunately retained self-possession enough to curtsy also, though not to say a word.

“It’s a little girl with wild flowers, my lady,” explained the friendly Eliza, opening the basket. “She wants to try for the prize, your ladyship.”

“So this is Lady Innisfalen,” thought Maureen, “and not the Queen,” and she took heart of grace.

“How beautiful!” cried her wonderful ladyship, lifting the fresh, fragrant blooms from under the grasses. “Did you make these bouquets yourself, child?”



"Sure, I did, me lady," answered Maureen, lifting her clear, blue eyes with a delighted smile to the kind, dark ones above.

"Well, little one," pushing back the shawl and smoothing with gentle fingers the yellow tendrils of hair, "they are all beautiful, all three of them, and I am proud to give prizes to children who work so hard to deserve them. You may look at the other flowers now," for Maureen's eyes, despite herself, were wandering in their direction, "and I will mark your bunches. What is her name, Eliza?" she questioned, taking up a card and pencil, as Maureen darted for the nosegays like a bee to a fresh bloom.

"Maureen, my lady," replied Eliza, with another curtsy, "at least, Mary, I believe it is in English, your ladyship."

"Mary what, child?"

"Mary" — hesitating, "I'm afraid I don't know, my lady. They call her Maureen Bawn. Oh, yes, her grandmother's name is O'Brien. Would that do, your ladyship?"

It appeared that would do, and this matter



settled, Eliza dragged her charge away from the wild flowers and hurried off to place the white geranium in safety and see that it was correctly labeled.

Now everything was done that could be done, Maureen's heart was quite at rest and she was ready for gayety; for although she had seen in the tent a bunch of grasses decidedly finer than her own and containing much greater variety, yet so far, at least, there was nothing to rival her ferns or her flowers.

People who had come to the festival from six, eight, ten, and even twelve miles away were already having early tea, and Maureen invested her precious penny in a bag of wonderful assorted cakes, which she shared with Eliza, who promised to treat her later on. Granny was discovered in a tea booth with old Michael and his wife, an' they were just afther seein' Teigue, who was lookin' fine, glory be! Had the children visited all the tents and seen the butter and cheese and vegetables and the fine laces and embroidery, and did they know that the prize for the best

hornpipe-dancing by boys was two shillings and sixpence? The dancing was about to begin, they said, and they would come as soon as they finished their tea; so Maureen, promising to find her grandmother when Lady Innisfalen conferred the prizes, ran away with Eliza to where the sports were going on.

Hurdle jumping, throwing weights, sack-racing, were being watched by a crowd of men and boys, perfectly well behaved, but ten times as excited as any English crowd could possibly have been; and there, dancing on a small platform encircled by intent spectators, their gaze fixed on every movement, was — yes, certainly, there was Teigue himself!

His face was serious, for this was an important occasion indeed, and he felt himself under the eyes of the world. He looked straight before him, quite unconscious of his sister's presence, and with flushed cheeks and tossing hair, his long green necktie waving like a banner, his feet went swiftly, — beat, beat, beat, shuffle, shuffle, shuffle, clatter, clatter, clatter, to the music of the concertina.

It seemed impossible that movements could be made by any lad with greater grace and lightness and precision, and evidently the on-lookers thought so too, as amid cheers and clappings Teigue brought his dance to a close with a low bow, and left the platform mopping his crimson cheeks and pushing back his damp hair.

Maureen was by his side in a moment, for the bond between the two orphan children was very close, and with the admiring Eliza on his other side, he assumed charge of the party for the remainder of the afternoon. The widow O'Brien did not attempt to keep up with their youthful movements, but gossiped with old friends she chanced to meet, gazed with simple delight at the grand quality she encountered here and there, and at the first note of the warning bugle hurried to the stand where Lady Innisfalen was to give out the prizes.

The crowd was already so great when she arrived that she could not reach her Goldilocks, though she saw her on the other side of the roped inclosure, standing alone. Teigue and

Eliza were some yards away, and the child, with wide excited eyes and scarlet cheeks, quite unconscious of all about her, gripped the rope with her small hands, the shawl slipping back from the shining, primrose curls.

Lord Innisfalen made a brief witty speech, exceedingly well taken by the alert hearers, who were far too Irish to be able to miss the point of any joke, even if they had wished; and then the Countess advanced, and the giving out of the prizes began. They were of all sorts and kinds, — vases, bits of plated silver, tobacco-boxes, toilet sets, dress patterns, pocket knives, packages of garden seeds, blooming plants, dishes, — anything and everything which might be supposed suited to the tastes of men and women, boys and girls, whose cabins held little beyond bare necessities. There were money prizes too, bright sixpences and shillings; and with every gift the Countess said a few appropriate words, and the happy claimant came up without undue shyness or embarrassment and thanked her ladyship with native Irish grace and courtesy.

“Teigue O’Brien ! First prize for hornpipe dancing by boys between twelve and eighteen years !”

So called Lord Innisfalen, and Maureen’s heart seemed to stop beating as her brother made his way to the stand, and bowing very gracefully, she thought, received his reward of a shining half crown piece.

A long roll of Larries and Dennises, Patricks, Maurices, and Martins followed, and then there seemed to be dozens of shawled Kates and Bridgets and Margarets and Delias, who had shown themselves proficient in cheese and butter making or vegetable raising, or in cultivating gardens or keeping tidy cottages.

And then came the children, and “First prize for best bouquet of wild flowers !” “First prize for best bunch of ferns. Mary O’Brien !” shouted the Earl.

Maureen’s heart sank. Was this because she had lost the Luck of The O’Donoghue ? . . . Was she to be distanced altogether in the race ? . . . Had she won nothing, nothing whatever, with all her trying ? . . . Was there



to be no pig in the little thatched cottage, for Teigue's money was not even half enough to buy one? . . . Was she to have nothing to take her dear, good, patient granny, and she had promised her so much! At the thought a sob came in her throat and the sudden tears rushed into her eyes.

"Mary O'Brien!" called Lord Innisfalen again, and "Mary O'Brien!" repeated the Countess.

"Where was the girl?" thought Maureen, looking up impatiently. "Why could n't she go and take her prize?"

She caught her grandmother's eye at that moment, as she waved a red handkerchief at her excitedly from the other side of the stand. What did she mean? What did she want her to do?

A hoarse whisper came from Teigue as he leaned across a row of men, "Maureen, what ails ye, at all?" Eliza slipped through the crowd and gave her a push, while she tweaked her shawl. "Maureen! What's the matter with you? Why don't you go up?" she cried.



“Och, woman alive ! ’t is Maureen Bawn !” murmured an old dame to her neighbor. “Sure, ’t is Pathrick O’Brien’s daughter she is, rest his soul ; but there’s no wan does be callin’ her Mary O’Brien.”

The child started at Eliza’s push, and in a flash realized her good fortune.

“Sure, ’t is meself they do be callin’ !” she laughed, as she stepped forward.

Eliza’s impatient pull at the shawl had dragged it off her shoulders, and quite regardless of her loss, Maureen Bawn moved up the inclosure, the setting sun painting a halo in the gold of her uncovered hair.

Her limpid blue eyes, “violets with souls in them,” looked up smiling into Lady Innisfalen’s ; sweetly and unconsciously she bent to kiss the beautiful white hand stretched out to her, and as the silver pieces shone in her small pink palm, she turned away, the happiest child in the kingdom of Kerry.



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